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POE AND THE *BALTIMORE SATURDAY VISITER*

In the three years that followed his dismissal from West Point, Edgar Allan Poe might well have disputed Hawthorne's claim to be the obscurest man of letters in America. Although he was the author of three published volumes of verse, Poe had made so slight an impression on his times that the most diligent of biographers have had difficulty in learning where and how he spent these years. It begins to be clear that his residence during the whole period was Baltimore, and that, having put a military career behind him, he was striving without help or encouragement to be wholly a man of letters. He was rescued from obscurity by successful competition for a prize offered by a Baltimore weekly, devoted, in the phrase of the time, to polite literature. This paper was the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*. It had been established early in 1832 by Mr. Charles F. Cloud, with Lambert A. Wilmer, a friend of Poe, as editor. By the end of the year Mr. Cloud had taken a partner, William P. Pouder, and Wilmer had been succeeded as editor by John H. Hewitt. In the summer of 1833 the *Visiter* announced an offer of two prizes, one of fifty dollars for the best tale, and another of twenty-five dollars for the best poem submitted to them before October first. Poe competed for both prizes. His *MS. Found in a Bottle*, one of six *Tales of the Folio Club* which he sent in, won the fifty dollar prize as the best tale. What was far more important, it brought him the friendship of John P. Kennedy, whose kindly help and encouragement came to Poe in a time of direst need.

No editor of Poe, so far as I am aware, has had access to a file of the *Visiter*, and it has been generally supposed¹ that no

¹ *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by James A. Harrison, I, 307. *The Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by Killis Campbell, p. 219.

such file had survived. I have recently been fortunate enough to learn that Volume III of the *Visiter* has been preserved by descendants of the proprietors, who have kindly permitted me to examine it. Besides affording first-hand information about the contest which proved so momentous in Poe's life, the volume contains one new poem undoubtedly by Poe and two more which are probably also his work.

I

Our knowledge of the circumstances of the *Saturday Visiter's* prize contest has hitherto been somewhat legendary. The earliest misstatement in regard to it seems to have been made by R. W. Griswold in the "Ludwig Article" in the *New York Tribune* of October 9, 1849.² He gives the date as 1831, and invents details to the effect that Poe received the prize solely because he had written legibly, and that "not another ms. was unfolded." In 1875, when the monument to Poe erected through the efforts of teachers and pupils in the Baltimore public schools was to be dedicated, one of the three judges of the contest, Mr. J. H. B. Latrobe, was still living. He was asked to give his personal recollections of the poet. The address³ which Mr. Latrobe delivered, on November 17, 1875, as a part of the dedication ceremony, was a circumstantial account of the award of the prizes, which gave the lie to Griswold's malicious inventions, and an interesting and valuable description of Poe as he appeared in an interview a few days later.

The winner of the prize for the best poem, Mr. John H. Hewitt,⁴ was also living and was present at the dedication. In a volume of random reminiscences⁵ which he published in 1877, he alludes to Mr. Latrobe's address, and gives his own account of the contest. Curiously enough he confirms Latrobe's error as to the amount of the prizes, which he says were one hundred dollars and fifty

² Harrison, I, 351.

³ *Edgar Allan Poe. A Memorial Volume*, by Sara Sigourney Rice, Baltimore, 1877, p. 57.

⁴ His name is misspelled by Whitty, *The Complete Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by J. H. Whitty, p. xxxvii.

⁵ *Shadows on the Wall or Glimpses of the Past*, by John H. Hewitt, Baltimore, 1877, pp. 39-43; 154-158.

dollars. From Hewitt's account it is apparent that the judges informed Poe that his poem *The Coliseum* would have received the twenty-five dollar prize if the larger prize had not already been awarded to him, and that the matter was the subject of some controversy between the two contestants. Hewitt alludes to this as a "little unpleasantness," and Gill in his life of Poe⁶ says that Poe tried, naturally in vain, to induce Hewitt to waive his claim to the honor but to keep the money. Hewitt and Poe had previously disagreed, as the result of a hostile review by Hewitt of Poe's Poems in 1829, and Hewitt's animus, though less vicious than Griswold's, is evident in every line that he has written about Poe.

Both Latrobe and Hewitt speak of the paper as the *Visitor*, and by various biographers it is spoken of as the *Saturday Morning Visitor*. Whatever it may have been called by later editors, the volume of 1833 was entitled the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*. The offer of the prizes first appears in the issue of June 15, and is repeated without change at varying intervals until September 7. It reads as follows:

PREMIUMS

The proprietors of the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* feeling desirous of encouraging literature, and at the same time serving their readers with the best that lies within their reach, offer a premium of 50 dollars for the best Tale and 25 dollars for the best Poem, not exceeding one hundred lines, that shall be offered them between the present period and the first of October next.

The following gentlemen have been chosen to decide on the merits of the productions:

John P. Kennedy, Esq.
John H. B. Latrobe, Esq.
Doctor James H. Miller

Those writers throughout the country who are desirous of entering the lists, will please forward their productions to *Cloud and Powder*, Baltimore, before the first of October (postpaid) enclosed in an envelope bearing the name of the writer. If secrecy is preferred, the name may be enclosed in a separate envelope, which will not be opened, except in the case of the successful author. We wish those

⁶ *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe*, by William Fearing Gill, New York, 1877, pp. 69-70.

who may write for either of the premiums to understand that all manuscripts submitted will become the property of the Publishers.

. Silver medals to the amount of the above rewards will be given in lieu of cash, if required.

The decision of the judges was announced in the *Visiter* of October 12. The text of the successful tale was not—as is asserted by various biographers—printed in this number, but in the issue of October 19. The announcement of the award is as follows:

THE PREMIUMS

It will be seen by the following letter that the Committee have decided on the merits of the various productions sent for the premiums offered by us. The “Manuscript found in a bottle” is the production of Edgar A. Poe, of Baltimore.

The poem entitled “The Song of the Winds” by Henry Wilton, of Baltimore.

The prize pieces shall be published next week.

Messrs. Cloud and Pouder—

Gentlemen:—We have received two pacquets containing the Poems and Tales submitted as competitors for the prizes offered by you in July last, and in accordance with your request have carefully perused them with a view to the award of the premiums.

Amongst the poems we have selected a short one, entitled “Song of the Winds,” as the most finished production offered. There were several others of such a degree of merit as greatly to perplex our choice and cause some hesitation in the award we have made.

Of the tales submitted there were many of various and distinguished excellence; but the singular force and beauty of those offered by “The Tales of the Folio Club,” it may be said without disparagement to the high merit of others presented in the competition, left us no ground for doubt in making choice of one from that collection. We have accordingly, awarded the prize in this department to the tale bearing the title of “A MS Found in a Bottle.” It would scarcely be doing justice to the author of this collection to say the tale we have chosen is the best of the six offered by him. We have read them all with unusual interest, and can not refrain from the expression of the opinion that the writer owes it to his own reputation, as well as to the gratification of the community to publish the whole volume. These tales are eminently distinguished by a wild, vigorous and poetical imagination, a rich style, a fertile invention, and varied and curious learning. Our selection of “A MS Found in a bottle” was rather dictated by the originality of its conception and its length, than by any superior merit in its execution over the others by the same author.

The general excellence of the whole of the compositions offered for the prizes is very creditable to the rising literature of our country.

Very Respectfully Gentl'n

John P. Kennedy
Jno. H. B. Latrobe
J. H. Miller

Baltimore, October 7, 1833.

In the next number the poem and the tale were duly published.⁷ The poem comes first, and, as in the report of the judges, is attributed to Henry Wilton. The use of a pseudonym is due, no doubt, to the fact that Hewitt was at the time editor of the *Visiter*. He prints *The Song of the Winds* as his own in the volume of reminiscences mentioned above.⁸ The successful tale was printed under the prefatory note:

The following is the tale to which the Premium of Fifty Dollars has been awarded by the Committee. It will be found highly graphic in its style of composition.

A careful collation of the text of the *MS. Found in a Bottle*, undertaken for me by a former student, shows that this earliest version does not differ markedly from that printed in December, 1835, in the *Southern Literary Messenger*.⁹ I give below those variants from the final text in the Harrison edition,¹⁰ which are also variants from the text of the *Messenger* (the Harrison reading is given first in each case). In all other variations from the final text the *Visiter* and the *Messenger* are in agreement.

Page 2, l. 28, as well for its color as (as well as for its color); 3, l. 22, left me without deigning (went below without deigning); 4, l. 5, impossible to say (impossible for me to say); 4, l. 12, whirlpool of mountainous and foaming ocean within which we were engulfed (whirlpool or mountains and foaming ocean within which we are engulfed); 5, l. 25, gave out no light (emitted no light); 7, ll. 29, 30, slowly from the dim and horrible gulf beyond her

⁷ In this issue there is a brief editorial comment in which occurs the remark, "It gives us great pleasure in stating for the literary credit of our city, that both the successful candidates are Baltimoreans."

⁸ *Shadows on the Wall*, p. 157.

⁹ Vol. II, p. 33.

¹⁰ Harrison, II, 1, 307.

(slowly from the everlasting gulf beyond her); 7, l. 34, I know not (I knew not); 10, l. 20, of this kind (of the kinds); 12, l. 16, escapes to the only (escapes from imminent and deadly peril to the only); 12, l. 22, there is (there was); 12, l. 27, that is, about five feet (that is, I mean, about five feet).

That Poe took to heart the advice of the judges that he publish the volume of tales which he had submitted to them is proved by an announcement in the *Visiter* a week later.

THE FOLIO CLUB

This is the title of a volume of tales from the pen of Edgar A. Poe, the gentleman to whom the committee appointed by the proprietors of this paper awarded the premium of \$50. The work is about being put to press, and is to be published by subscription. We have a list at our office, and any person wishing to subscribe will please call. The volume will cost but \$1.

The prize tale is not the best of Mr. Poe's productions; among the tales of the Folio Club there are many possessing uncommon merit. They are all characterized by a raciness, originality of thought and brilliancy of conception which are rarely to be met with in the writings of our most favored American authors. In assisting Mr. Poe in the publication of the Folio Club, the friends of native literature will encourage a young author whose energies have been partially damped by the opposition of the press, and, we may say, by the lukewarmness of the public in appreciating American productions. He has studied and written much—his reward rested on public approbation—let us give him something more substantial than bare praise. We ask our friends to come forward and subscribe to the work—there are many anxious to see it before the public.

In the next issue of the *Visiter* (that of November 2) the offer is withdrawn by the following note:

Mr. Poe has declined the publication of his Tales of the Folio Club in the manner stated in our last number. It is his intention, we understand, to bring them out in Philadelphia.

Later, on the advice of Mr. Kennedy, Poe sent the Tales to Carey and Lea, of Philadelphia,¹¹ in whose hands also they failed to reach publication as a collection.

¹¹ *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe*, by George E. Woodberry, Boston, 1909, 1, 100.

Besides the *MS. Found in a Bottle*, only two of the six tales sent to the *Visiter* have been identified. These two, according to a note in the *Southern Literary Messenger* for August, 1835,¹² were *Lionizing* and *The Visionary* (*The Assignment*). Dr. Killis Campbell has pointed out¹³ that five tales of the *Folio Club* were published during 1832 in the *Philadelphia Courier*. As the *Courier*, a periodical apparently somewhat similar to the *Visiter*, had offered in 1831 a prize of one hundred dollars for the best tale submitted before December 1 of that year, it is altogether probable, as Dr. Campbell conjectures, that Poe competed for this prize, and that after the award his tales were published, with or without his consent. The three known to have been sent to the *Visiter* are not among them. It had been stipulated by the proprietors of the *Visiter* that all manuscripts submitted in the contest should become the property of the paper. In the case of Poe's tales the right thus claimed seems not to have been insisted on. On October 26, however, one week after the appearance of Hewitt's poem, Poe's *The Coliseum* was published, without comment or allusion to the prize¹⁴ for which it had been submitted. This version of *The Coliseum* presents two interesting variations from the later texts. It begins with the line,

Lone ampitheatre! Grey Coliseum!

which is lacking in the *Messenger* and in later versions. The second line of the fourth paragraph of the poem,

These mouldering plinths; this broken frieze,

is metrically faulty. In the *Messenger* version Poe expanded it into two lines, which he retained in successive revisions:

These mouldering plinths; these sad, and blackened shafts;
These vague entablatures; this broken frieze;
These shattered cornices

In general, however, the text printed in the *Messenger* closely follows the original form.

¹² Vol. I, p. 716; cf. Woodberry, II, 401.

¹³ *The Dial*, LX, 143 (February 17, 1916).

¹⁴ In the *Southern Literary Messenger* for August, 1835 (I, 706), Poe entitles it *The Coliseum, A Prize Poem*.

II

After the publication of *The Coliseum* the volume contains no contribution by Poe, nor any mention of his name except the announcement of the subscription edition of the tales. An examination of the earlier issues is more fruitful. In the *Visiter* for April 20, 1833, is a poem by Poe hitherto unknown, so far as I can learn, to his editors and biographers. It runs as follows:

SERENADE.—BY E. A. POE.

So sweet the hour—so calm the time,
I feel it more than half a crime
When Nature sleeps and stars are mute,
To mar the silence ev'n with lute.
At rest on ocean's brilliant dies
An image of Elysium lies:
Seven Pleiades entranced in Heaven,
Form in the deep another seven:
Endymion nodding from above
Sees in the sea a second love.
Within the valleys dim and brown,
And on the spectral mountain's crown
The wearied light is dying down;
The earth, and stars, and sea, and sky
Are redolent of sleep, as I
Am redolent of thee and thine
Enthralling love, my Adeline.
But list, O list—so soft and low
Thy lover's voice tonight shall flow
That, scarce awake, thy soul shall deem
My words the music of a dream.
Thus, while no single sound too rude,
Upon thy slumber shall intrude,
Our thoughts, our souls—O God above!
In every deed shall mingle, love.

In imagery and in diction the *Serenade* is closely associated with the poems that Poe published in 1827 and 1829. Besides the usual atmosphere of strange light, fantastic stars, and half-waking

dreams, it makes use of some of the favorite words which pleased his ear at this time. With the second line,

I feel it more than half a crime,

compare the following passages peculiar to the 1827 version of *Tamerlane*:

To shun the fate with which to cope
Is more than crime may dare to dream (ll. 4 and 5).

And bade it first to dream of crime (l. 149).

When falsehood wore a ten-fold crime (l. 190).

and these lines from *Romance* (1829):

That little time with lyre and rhyme
To while away—forbidden things!
My heart would feel to be a crime
Unless it trembled with the strings.

Poe was also fond of the epithet *dim*, in the line

Within the valleys dim and brown.

In *Irene*, the 1831 version of *The Sleeper*, the word is used three times, one line in which it occurs,

Nodding above the dim abyss,

being peculiar to that version. A still closer parallel occurs in *Fairy-Land* (line 41 of the 1831 version),

Dim vales! and shadowy floods!

Among the poems with which the columns of the *Visiter* are somewhat generously supplied are the two following, published in the late spring, which instantly arrest the attention.

To —————

Sleep on, sleep on, another hour—
I would not break so calm a sleep,
To wake to sunshine and to show'r,
To smile and weep.

Sleep on, sleep on, like sculptured thing,
Majestic, beautiful art thou;

Sure seraph shields thee with his wing
And fans thy brow—

We would not deem thee child of earth,
For, O, angelic is thy form!
But, that in heav'n thou had'st thy birth,
Where comes no storm

To mar the bright, the perfect flow'r,
But all is beautiful and still—
And golden sands proclaim the hour
Which brings no ill.

Sleep on, sleep on, some fairy dream
Perchance is woven in thy sleep—
But, O, thy spirit, calm, serene
Must wake to weep.

TAMERLANE

FANNY

The dying swan by northern lakes
Sings its wild death song, sweet and clear;
And as the solemn music breaks
O'er hill and glen dissolves in air;
Thus musical thy soft voice came,
Thus trembled on thy tongue my name.

Like sunburst through the ebon cloud,
Which veils the solemn midnight sky,
Piercing cold evening's sable shroud,
Thus came the first glance of that eye;
But like the adamantine rock,
My spirit met and braved the shock.

Let memory the boy recall
Who laid his heart upon thy shrine,
When far away his footsteps fall,
Think that he deemed thy charms divine;
A victim on love's alter [sic] slain,
By witching eyes which looked disdain.

TAMERLANE

The pseudonym *Tamerlane* is, in view of Poe's use of the name on the title-page of his first and second volumes of verse, highly significant; and the tradition¹⁵ that Poe contributed "for six months" to the *Visiter* further justifies an inquiry as to the possibility that these poems may be by his hand. It is apparent at once that both poems have much in common with the moody verses that grew out of Poe's loneliness and injured pride after he left Richmond in 1827. Read in conjunction with the 1827 versions of "I saw thee on thy bridal day," *A Dream Within a Dream*, *A Dream*, *The Happiest Day*, *the Happiest Hour* and *The Lake; To* — they are entirely in place. They are, moreover, strikingly similar to these poems in mechanical details. Poe's early work is characterized, for example, by a lack of variety in rime-words. In the 1827 *Tamerlane* the word *hour* is rimed ten times, five times with the same word, i. e., *power*. In the final revision only three such rimes are retained. In *The Happiest Day*, *the Happiest Hour* the same rime, *hour—power*, occurs three times. *To* — is in the same meter and stanza as this poem and uses the rimes *hour—show'r* and *flow'r—hour*. *Fanny* is similar in meter to *The Lake; To* —, to which it is akin in subject. It inevitably suggests, also, the song, "I saw thee on thy bridal day," and a boyish love such as Poe is said to have felt for Mrs. Stannard.¹⁶ On the whole, the internal evidence so far confirms the suggestion of the pseudonym as to make it more than probable that in *Fanny* and *To* —, as well as in *Serenade*, we have authentic poems by Edgar Allan Poe.

JOHN C. FRENCH.

The Johns Hopkins University.

¹⁵ Harrison, I, 101.

¹⁶ *Fanny* may possibly record such an affection for Mrs. Allan's sister, who was known to Poe as "Aunt Fanny." Cf. Woodberry, *The Life of Poe*, I, 29, 68.